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AUTHOR Mullen, Bennat; And Others
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ABSTRACT

When initiating major structural change in schools, collaboration among educators, community members, and business persons is vital. This publication describes the efforts of the Ysleta (Texas) Independent School District, which successfully used collaboration to promote effective school change. Within the district, the Del Valle High School has initiated restructuring efforts focusing on student success, parental involvement, shared staff leadership, and partnerships with feeder schools and the local university. A school-site team focused on four goals: (1) develop consensus about the need for school change; (2) develop a realistic yet ambitious school vision; (3) identify student achievement patterns; and (4) critically assess key policies, practices, and procedures. All faculty members participated in faculty groups facilitated by school-site team members, in which they shared strategies to improve student achievement. Three other key elements were instituted to continue the change process: (1) a governance structure that promotes schoolwide ownership, commitment, and support for the changes; (2) a clear, comprehensive action plan; and (3) regular meetings with well-defined purposes and priority-driven agendas. The efforts of three other high schools that demonstrated effective change are briefly described--McNeil High School (Austin, Texas); Hico High School (Hico, Texas); and Copperas Cove High School (Copperas Cove, Texas). In conclusion, the chances of restructuring success are enhanced when all members of the school community are involved. Key elements are principals who are leaders, sustained quality training for all personnel, stakeholder collaboration, and empowerment. (LMI)

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Collaborative Leadership for Promoting Effective School Change

When initiating major structural change in schools, collaboration among educators, community members, and business persons is vital.

This effort requires strong administrative leadership, staff development, and an openness to change if the restructuring is to be successful.

One school district that has successfully used collaboration to promote effective change is the Ysleta (Tex.) Independent School District. Within the district, the Del Valle High School, which enrolls more than 2,000 students, is undergoing significant restructuring efforts focusing on student success, parental involvement, shared staff leadership, and partnerships with feeder schools and the local university.

Leadership training for Del Valle teachers and principal Lionel Nava has been provided through the El Paso Collaborative for Academic Excellence, which the University of Texas at El Paso established in 1992 to help educators define academic standards for students in the respective subject matter areas.

A team from Del Valle High School, which included eight teachers, the principal, the assistant principal, and a counselor, focused on four goals during their leadership training:

- Develop consensus about the need for school change
- Develop a realistic yet ambitious vision of what the school can be

- Identify student achievement patterns in the school
- Critically assess key policies, practices, and procedures and identify ways to improve student achievement.

During their initial training, school site team members read and shared interpretations of articles about restructuring and discussed student achievement and what the teachers needed to change so every student in the school could be academically successful.

In these meetings, the school team members discussed the school's strengths and limitations and recognized that they had the power to change the school environment.

The training set the stage for school change.

Involving the School and Community in Change

After their initial training, the school site team members developed a communications plan for sharing the information and insights they gained with the entire faculty.

To motivate the school staff to commit to the change efforts and to develop a sense of ownership in the restructuring process, the site team replicated some of the training they received during the summer.

The 143-member school staff was divided into faculty groups of 13-15 members. Each school site team

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member served as a facilitator to a group. During monthly meetings, the faculty members discussed ways to address the strengths and weaknesses of the school. The facilitators:

- Initiated discussions that led to a change in mindset
- Guided the group in examining issues in depth and facing difficult issues or problems rather than avoiding them
- Helped create trust among group members, ensured meaningful participation by all group members, and resolved conflict when necessary.

After their initial training, the school site team members developed a communications plan for sharing the information and insights they gained with the entire faculty.

In addition to focusing on specific issues and classroom/curriculum practices that affect student success, all faculty members shared strategies to improve student achievement.

The leadership team continues to receive training in site-based decision-making strategies. In addition, three key elements were instituted to continue the change process.

1. A governance structure was formed that promotes schoolwide ownership, commitment, and support for the changes. The structure also provides mechanisms for informing everyone in the school about change efforts and soliciting input.

The governing structure includes cadres of "sub-teams" that focus on curriculum and instruction, mathe-

matics, language arts, parent partnerships, school climate, staff development, and flexible scheduling. All "sub-teams" work in tandem with the Campus Education Improvement Committee, which is a site-based management committee mandated by Texas law.

2. A comprehensive plan of action has clear goals and tasks, and established timelines, and provides an opportunity for school personnel to monitor and evaluate change.

3. Regular meetings with well-defined purposes and priority-driven agendas are held.

Results of the Change Process

This collaborative process led to:

- The development of a Mathematics Institute that provides teachers and administrators an opportunity to learn the best mathematics curriculum and instructional practices available.
- Leadership training for teachers that has led to teacher empowerment regarding school-level issues that are then referred to the Campus Education Improvement Committee for resolution.
- Continuous contact with parents. The school has developed a three-week report card instead of a progress report that parents must pick up after school or in the evening. This allows parents to meet with teachers and discuss student progress before the end of the grading period.
- Contact and dialogue with feeder elementary schools. The high school computer math and science labs are open to feeder schools on Saturdays. Del Valle teachers and students are avail-

able to help elementary school students enhance their skills in these areas.

- A project entitled "Highlights of Schools," through which parents and community members can become familiar with educational programs and progress.

Students are the key component at Del Valle. This focus is evident in the following strategies:

- A block schedule allows students to earn 32 credits in four years. This eight-period A/B rotation cycle gives all students eight options for class choice. The schedule allows students the opportunity to receive tutoring in specific areas, take ACT/SAT preparation classes, or enroll in tech-prep classes.
- A 90-minute mentor/study skills class is available for freshmen and a 30-minute weekly mentor class is open to all other students.
- An intramural program allows students to participate in numerous competitive activities during their lunch periods. These activities culminate each semester with tournaments.
- A tuition-free summer school program increases learning opportunities for all students.
- A dropout recovery program allows students to meet graduation requirements in an alternative setting.
- Math and writing centers serve the special needs of students and coordinate instruction between Del Valle and feeder schools.

"Ensuring academic success for all Del Valle High School students is our dream," says Principal Lionel Nava. "We are committed to the

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vision that all our graduates will have the knowledge and skills necessary to enter and succeed in the college of their choice or otherwise be able to secure decent employment. Our teachers are committed to change and are working and sharing resources to effectively improve student performance. Their deacons have already initiated implementation of various programs designed to help students succeed beyond high school."

To Illustrate

 McNeil High School
5720 McNeil Drive
Austin, Texas 78729
(512) 258-3199
Contact: Alan Veach, principal

Veach is a former middle level principal who uses the middle level student-centered philosophy in his high school of 1,100 students. Academic teaming and teacher collaboration are a focus on this campus.

Currently, ninth and tenth graders are teamed for mathematics, science, English, and history.

The principal meets regularly with the team members during the common planning time. The curriculum centers on an interdisciplinary approach that allows teachers to collaborate across disciplines. Instructional practices support collaborative learning strategies and address diverse learning styles of students that permit more heterogeneous and inclusionary support systems.

All curriculum and instructional issues are discussed through the campus leadership team composed of all department chairpersons. These staff members have a common planning period that allows the

principal to meet with them every Wednesday afternoon to discuss school-related concerns.

This shared leadership approach to school management continues to increase the effectiveness of academic efforts and the total school environment.

The school also provides a daily comprehensive study advisory period that allows time for teachers to work with their homeroom students to reduce student anonymity and enhance counseling support services by monitoring a student's high school progress more closely.

Staff development is in the hands of the teachers. They prepare, coordinate, and deliver staff development efforts for the entire school. This focus on shared leadership and responsibility at the school level is fully supported by the administration.

 Hico High School
College & Kirk Streets
Hico, Texas 76457
(817) 796-2184
Contact: Jim Everitt, principal

Hico High School has established a partnership with nearby Tarelton State University that has allowed Hico to redefine its organizational structure to better meet the needs of students.

Through support from the Effective Schools Project at Tarelton's School of Education, Hico has moved to a performance-based system that uses mastery learning as a strategy to both decrease student failure and develop portfolio assessments for all its students. Through mastery learning, student failure rates have been reduced by more than 50 percent.

An interdisciplinary instructional process allows English and social

studies teachers to work closely together. Performance standards in English and social studies have already been developed; science and mathematics are soon to be part of the school's interdisciplinary process.

The campus schedule has also been reorganized to better meet the needs of its students. Not only does the school use a block schedule, the school also employs extended day and extended year plans that permit flexible scheduling for both students and teachers.

The school has also developed individual education plans for all students. These plans are monitored to link students' postsecondary goals with their current high school course of study. Preparing graduates who have the ability to translate content into application is a major school goal.

 Copperas Cove High School
400 South 25th Street
Copperas Cove, Texas 76522
(817) 547-2534
Contact: W.L. Sanders, principal

The school's academic mission focuses on providing students with the skills necessary to make them successful in "the real world." Therefore, the school is totally committed to and involved in site-based decision making with participation from students, parents, community members, and school personnel. These individuals participate in 15 school task forces and five action teams that analyze critical areas of concern, propose policies, and make recommendations for new programs or modifications to existing programs.

These task forces and action teams are each involved in research and the dissemination of informa-

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tion to the faculty to enhance student achievement. Because the campus is results-based, all departments use product and performance-based assessment; methods used include portfolios, models, demonstrations, and performances.

The campus instructional program places special emphasis on higher order thinking, cooperative learning, learning styles, alternative assessments, thematic studies, and communication across the curriculum.

Each teacher must meet with a student's parent or guardian before the student can receive a failing grade. Teachers are also given the opportunity to work with outside consultants who are experts in various fields of education to improve student and teacher performance. This allows for the development of "in-house" experts who deliver campus inservice during staff de-

velopment sessions.

Shared leadership allows student advisory committees to meet regularly with the superintendent and principal to discuss concerns and upcoming events. Students also participate in the selection process for new administrators and counselors.

To ensure the vocational curriculum is addressing issues relevant to the workplace, a committee of business leaders meets regularly to review the curriculum.

Ninth grade academic teaming teachers work closely with the middle level teachers and students to ease the transition from middle level to high school. A pen pal program between eighth and ninth grade English classes allows a forum through which eighth graders can plan their ninth grade academic plan.

The school's Focus Program and Conflict Mediation Center develop skills that encourage self-discipline, non-violent conflict resolution, and positive self-esteem through em-

powerment.

This high school is dedicated to growth and meaningful change. All staff members are leaders and life-long learners so their students can become successful, contributing members of society.

Conclusion

Restructuring is a slow process, but its chances for success are multiplied when all members of the school community are involved. Key elements are principals who are leaders, sustained quality training for all personnel, collaboration among stakeholders, and empowerment.

Written by Bennat Mullen, professor of school administration at Stephen F. Austin State University; Lionel Nava, principal at Del Valle High School, El Paso, Tex.; and Mauro Serrano, senior director of secondary education for the Texas Education Agency.

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